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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TBILISI 000378

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/25/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: ALASANIA ANNOUNCES ALLIANCE, CALL FOR

REFERENDUM ON NEW ELECTIONS

REF: A. TBILISI 357

[1](#)B. TBILISI 324

[1](#)C. 08 TBILISI 2189

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Just a week after presenting his new political team and with much fanfare, former Georgian Ambassador to the UN Irakli Alasania announced February 23 that his political team would join forces with the Republican party, led by David Usupashvili, and the New Rights party, led by David Gamkrelidze. The combined forces will make up a new Alliance for Georgia (Alliance) which will be led by Alasania. Alasania issued an ultimatum to President Saakashvili to call for a referendum on new Presidential elections within ten days. Less than 24 hours later, David Usupashvili publicly stated that the Alliance had no intention of actually pursuing the referendum because the procedure was too time consuming. While united in their desire to see Saakashvili resign, the non-parliamentary opposition is unable to agree on tactics. At least one part of the non-parliamentary opposition, led by former Speaker Nino Burjanadze and former FM Salome Zourabichvili, has announced that they will take their grievances to the street in April rather than engaging in constitutional processes and civic discussion. End Summary.

The Alliance

[1](#)2. (C) After having publicly declared their desire to unite with Alasania late last year (Ref C), Usupashvili and Gamkrelidze joined with Alasania to announce a new Alliance and to publicly present their plan to force new Presidential elections; namely, the issuance of an ultimatum to President Saakashvili to call for the holding of a referendum on new Presidential elections within ten days. Otherwise, Alasania would have to take unspecified actions, although he was careful not to call for street actions or protest. At the same event, Usupashvili and Gamkrelidze announced that they would support Alasania for President. (Embassy Note: Having kept them at arms length since his return to Georgia in December and despite earlier private statements that he would not join "the two Dats", Alasania apparently decided that the New Rights/Republicans party infrastructure (and funds) outweighed potential negative consequences of a formal association with two relatively unpopular political figures. Rumors abounded that former Presidential candidate Levan Gachicheladze and the Conservative Party were in discussions about joining the Alliance, but ultimately declined. End Note.)

What Was That All About?

[1](#)3. (C) Two days after Alasania delivered his public ultimatum calling on the President to agree to a referendum in ten days, the Alliance's strategy appears to be dead on arrival. Alasania political team member and former Ambassador to Turkmenistan Alex Petriashvili admitted to poloffs that the referendum process was going nowhere.

According to Petriashvili, the Alliance had no expectation of a response from the President or his administration. Petriashvili acknowledged the potential Constitutional hurdles to calling for new elections (Ref A) and the simple logistical problems that the Alliance would face in trying to collect the required 200,000 signatures to begin the referendum process. He agreed with Poloff's observation that the petition process could be drawn out indefinitely, saying the President would make sure the process lasts until 2013. Surprisingly, a day after announcing the ultimatum, Alasania's ally Usupashvili publicly said "that achieving a referendum through the collection of 200,000 signatures was not the option the alliance would follow." Usupashvili said publicly what Petriashvili had said privately: the process was simply too time consuming. Usupashvili did leave open the possibility that the Alliance would collect signatures outside of the referendum process as a public effort to further strengthen their position.

14. (C) Even more surprisingly, immediately after announcing the ultimatum, Alasania left for Brussels and a number of other European capitals. According to Petriashvili, Alasania will not return to Tbilisi until the day the ultimatum expires (March 5). Petriashvili indicated the Alliance may collect some signatures, but they had not discussed the logistics of such an operation. Petriashvili expected the ultimatum to fail and he admitted that the Alliance had no plan to encourage or even pressure the President, the PM or members of Parliament to support a referendum process. Alasania had not written any letters to encourage support. He said that the Alliance would probably eventually join whatever street protests might be organized, but had not yet decided on a coordinated plan. Petriashvili did not know how

TBILISI 00000378 002 OF 003

the protests would turn out saying "we'll see together." He also confirmed that the Alliance had no polling data to support his contention that the public wanted new elections, preferring to rely on his and his teams' instincts about the Georgian population as a guide.

Non-Parliamentary Opposition Sniping Begins

15. (C) The non-parliamentary opposition beyond Alasania's new alliance is moving ahead with plans for street protests beginning April 9. Former Speaker of Parliament Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement/United Georgia) made a statement February 24 calling on President Saakashvili to resign or call for new presidential elections by April 9. Kakha Kukava (Conservatives) said that no referendum should be held under Saakashvili's presidency and called for Saakashvili's immediate resignation. Zviad Dzidziguri said the Conservatives would also engage in street rallies on April 9, vowing to "live" on Rustaveli Avenue. Koba Davitashvili (People's Party) criticized Alasani's referendum proposal and warned that differences in tactics might confuse supporters and serve to undermine the entire process of forcing Saakashvili to resign. Usupashvili shot back that the Alliance did not want to become a hostage to pre-announced dates for protest rallies. Usupashvili added that the Alliance was different than the other non-parliamentary groups because "the process" is more important for them than any specific date for protest. Adding that the process should lead to a date and not vice versa, Usupashvili acknowledged that the undefined "process" might lead to joining in the April 9 protests. Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way), tried to make sense of it all saying that a difference in tactics did not mean confrontation between the various opposition parties. She said the goal was the same and "multi-pronged" tactics could be used to force Saakashvili's resignation. As an interesting note, Petriashvili told poloffs that former PM Noghaideli had declined to join the Alliance or the calls for a referendum, telling Alasania that he believed the public would not support those efforts at this time.

Delving Deeper Into Alasania's Political Team

¶6. (C) According to Patriashvili, the August war was the breaking point for this team whose foundation is former Ambassadors. Ambassadors Alasania, Petriashvili, Dolidze, and Mikeladze (Ref B) have spent much of their diplomatic careers working to remove Russian troops from Georgia and reunite their country. Dolidze, Mikeladze and Petriashvili were key members of Georgia's team which negotiated the CFE Istanbul Commitments in 1999. In their view, the 2008 August war had needlessly undermined their painstaking work of many years. Petriashvili indicated there were many other professionals in the MFA and other ministries who shared this view and that the Alliance hoped for their support. Petriashvili constructed a compelling case against Saakashvili's foreign policy decisions, but seemed much less sure on his feet when speaking of domestic economic and political issues. Petriashvili was convinced that President Saakashvili needed to be replaced, but, like others in the non-parliamentary opposition, was short on practical, constitutional ways to make it happen.

¶7. (C) Petriashvili was mostly silent when asked about the long term goals of both the Alliance and Alasania's political team. He believed a lagging economy will hurt Saakashvili's popularity, but was not sure it will be enough to force new elections. Petriashvili demurred when asked if allying with Gelections. Petriashvili demurred when asked if allying with New Rights/Republicans and engaging in street protests could tarnish the moderate image that Alasania has been careful to maintain. Petriashvili said the public understands that they are diplomats and not rabble rousers, and noted the Alliance will only decide on its next steps after the 10 day period is over. When asked about other possible cooperation, Petriashvili said that consultations with all parties continued. An important issue which remains unclear is whether Alasania's team is committed for the long haul. Petriashvili told poloff that if elections would not be forthcoming, the members of the team would have to find other jobs.

¶8. (C) In a separate conversation with Emboffs, Alliance team member Levan Mikeladze told emboffs that he was not resigning his position with Tethys Oil in Geneva and did not yet have plans to return full time to Tbilisi. He spoke in terms of a grave crisis confronting the country and widespread public dissatisfaction with Saakashvili and his government, but acknowledged that his views were based on conversations with family and friends in Tbilisi rather than polling data or public discussions.

Where is the Alliance Heading?

TBILISI 00000378 003 OF 003

¶9. (C) Embassy Comment: Alasania's decision to head for Europe immediately after announcing the Alliance and referendum ultimatum is curious, leaving some to question his commitment to engaging in politics here. Rather than bringing the non-parliamentary opposition together, Alasania's political actions thus far have further divided it. Rumor has it that Burjanadze is furious that Alasania has usurped what she sees as her rightful position -- succeeding Saakashvili as President -- driving her into the arms of her former adversary Zourabichvili. With no clear vision for further action, Alasania and his new Alliance have gotten off to an awkward start. End Comment.
TEFFT